

CHAMP THORNTON

RADICALLY

DIFFERENT

#GOODBADNEW

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO COMMUNITY

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Contents

Introduction	1
How to Use This Book	2

RELATING TO GOD

Week One: God	5
Week Two: Good	13
Week Three: Bad	21
Week Four: New	31
Week Five: Listening to God	41
Week Six: Talking to God	47
Week Seven: Worshiping God	55

RELATING TO PEOPLE

Week Eight: Relating to Parents	61
Week Nine: Relating to Friends	67
Week Ten: Relating to Family	75
Week Eleven: Difficult Relationships	83
Week Twelve: Broken Relationships	89
Week Thirteen: Church Relationships	97

Acknowledgments	105
Notes	107

Introduction

As you have been growing up, you have probably started to discover that life is getting complicated.

You've got to try to remember all your work for school and home. Then there are things you really enjoy, such as playing sports or video games and being with friends in person or online. You try to do several of these, and life starts to get busy. You think, *I can't keep up!* It becomes complex. *How do I handle this situation? What do I say now?* And it becomes difficult. *Why is that person making it so hard? What's the right thing to do in this relationship?*

It's tough to know what to do because almost nothing around us tells us how to live life God's way. We live in a broken world filled with people who don't love and obey God.

Yet God hasn't left us alone in this darkness. You may already believe the Bible is God's Word or at least believe that it's good for church topics. It talks about Jesus and going to heaven. But what about the tough stuff—especially people problems—that you face every day?

When you read it carefully, you'll find that the Bible shines light even on the dark and difficult parts of life. But don't take *my word* for it. Come see for yourself.

Learning how God's Word speaks to you and everything you're facing (and I mean *everything*) is one of the most important parts of growing up. It's not easy, but it's worth the effort. You'll have to use the mind God gave you to read and think. And you'll have to give of your time—that means you'll have to work at it because you won't always feel like it.

I've tried to provide some help to make your journey a bit easier. This book will direct you to specific parts of God's Word. And most weeks you'll read about a different type of relationship and discover for yourself what God says about it.

God is calling you to live in community with others—to live in the light of his Word. He wants you to be a bright light in a dark world.

Are you ready to be *radically different*?

How to Use This Book

The Big Story

The first four weeks of *Radically Different* prepare you for the remainder of the book. Week 1 begins with what is most important—God himself. Weeks 2–4 introduce the keys that unlock every door in life—the three lenses through which to look at every question. They are the following:

Week 2: Creation (*good*—God made everything “very good”)

Week 3: Fall (*bad*—everything is messed up because of sin)

Week 4: Redemption (*new*—God sent Jesus to set things right)

In other words, when you’re trying to figure something out, in relationships or anywhere else in life, ask these three questions:

- How is it good because God made it (Creation)?
- How is it messed up because of Adam and Eve’s sin (the Fall)?
- And how has Jesus’s death restored it to its original goodness—or even better (Redemption)?

CREATION	FALL	REDEMPTION
God made it . . .	We broke it . . .	Jesus fixes it. ¹
Good	Bad	New
God’s World Designed	God’s World Bent	God’s World Restored

These three words—good, bad, new—are like three lenses of a telescope. You can, and should, look at everything in life through all three lenses.

The Weekly Plan

For the remainder of the weeks you’ll use these three lenses to look at different topics. What’s good/bad/new about your relationship with God? About your relationship with friends, parents, difficult people, etc.? (Hint: These lenses are for *any* area of life—like your own emotions, interests, plans, stuff, and activities.)

Since you’re busy, this study requires your time only *three* days each week. And each day should not take you more than ten minutes to go through the introduction, pray, read the Bible verses listed, answer the questions, and reflect on what you’ve learned.

The Daily Fight

Each day you use this book, you'll likely face some struggles. First, your responsibilities or plans may easily crowd out your time in God's Word. So plan ahead. *Put your time with the Lord into your schedule.* Many people find it helpful to spend time with the Lord not long after waking up (see Mark 1:35).

Second, your heart may easily get distracted with other things to do. When it's time to be in God's Word, everything else may shout for your attention. Prepare for this. *Make your time in the Word a priority.* Nothing is more important than the Lord. Seek him and his priorities, and he'll take care of the other details in your life (Matthew 6:33).

Third, your focus may shift away from the Lord. Each week you'll look at a different topic related to relationships. Don't let your thinking about these things pull your attention from the main thing—God. *Keep your focus on the Lord himself.* This book isn't actually about what you think but about what you love. And we're to love God most of all (Mark 12:30).

Enough introductions—let's dive in!

WEEK ONE

GOD



This book is about relationships. But where to start? There are so many different people in your life—friends and family members, people at school and at church, fun people and not-so-fun people. Where do we dive in? Let's start where it's always best to begin—with God himself.

The Bible helps you see him, like a telescope helps you look at stars. When you look at a star—massive and erupting with energy—*without* a telescope, it seems like a tiny twinkle in the night sky. In the same way, some people imagine God as a distant and kind, bearded old man. Yet if you could really see what God is like, you'd be blown away! He's ablaze with limitless power, wisdom, beauty, and love. And this is how the Bible helps us see what God is truly like.

So when you open God's Word, remember to always look for who God is and what he's like. But before you start to read the passage of Scripture for each day this week, take time to pray from your heart this prayer or one like it.

PRAYER

"God, you have told us what you're like in your Word; please help me to really see what you've written, and most of all to see and get to know you better. In Jesus's name, Amen."

("Amen," means something like, "this is what I really mean," or "let it be so," or "I agree with what I've said." But most people usually just mean: "I'm done praying now.")

Day 1

Read John 1:14 and 18 (below). Remember, ask the Lord to help you understand what you've read.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. John 1:14, 18

► In John 1:14, someone is given the title “the Word.” Whoever this is, he’s communicating a very important message from God. Who do you think this is? (Hint: In the Bible who became human and lived among other human beings?)

► According to these verses, where can people see God? Who has made him known? Put verse 18 in your own words.

(When you see a lowercase letter after a verse number, that indicates a certain part of the verse. So, for example: verse “18a,” refers to the first part of verse 18, usually up to the first punctuation mark, like a comma or semicolon. Verse 18b, would refer to the next section, and 18c would be the third section, etc.)



THINK ABOUT IT

If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus. You can see what God is like in the powerful ways Jesus healed people, defeated demons, and controlled the weather. But as God's Son, Jesus revealed the Father in *everything* he did. Every kind word, every humble act of service, every moment of patience—all this shows you what our God is truly like in real-life ways we can understand.



Jesus revealed the Father in everything he did.

DAY 2

Read 1 John 4:8 (below). (After you read, take time to pray the prayer at the beginning of this week, and then read 1 John 4:8 again.)

{ ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:8

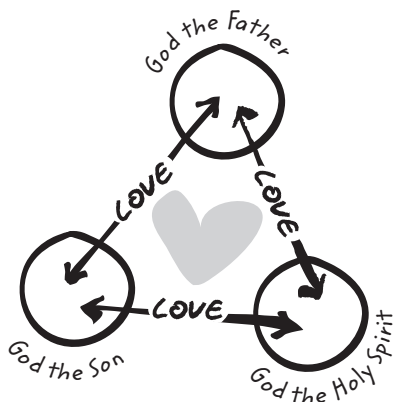
▶ On Day 1, you learned how Jesus showed us exactly what God the Father is like. He revealed him. The question for today is what did Jesus reveal about the Father? What does 1 John 4:8 say that God is?

▶ Which of the following does this verse NOT say? Cross through the wrong answers.

- God “does loving things.”
- God “became love” by sending Jesus.
- God is “usually loving.”
- God is love.

▶ What do you think it means when John wrote, God is love?

▶ Did you realize that God, at his very heart, *loves to love*? That’s what he is actually like—at his core.



All this can be hard to think about. But here is the basic point: there has never, ever been a time when God was not full and overflowing with love. God *is* love. Take a moment and ask God to pour out his love into your heart today.

Devotional

Day 3

So far this week, we've seen that Jesus shows us exactly what God is like, and what we learn about God is that he is full of love. That's just what he's like; no one twists his arm to be loving.

- But if God is love (not that he "became" love), what did God love before he created everything? Give this some thought, then write down your ideas.

Read John 17:24.

24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. John 17:24

- How does this verse answer the previous question? What was God doing before he made the universe? Whom was he loving?



THINK ABOUT IT

This will not fit into our little human brains, but here's the mind-blowing truth: God has always been. And what he's always been is this: a loving Father to his Son. God the Father has always loved the Son, and the Son has always loved the Father (John 14:31). Together with the Holy Spirit, the Father and Son didn't make the world and people because they needed someone to love (they had each other, right?). Instead, because they were already so full of love—and always had been—the Father, Son, and Spirit created the world to share their love with others.

IN CLOSING

IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

If you've been around other Christians, you've probably heard the term "Trinity." This term is a compound word:

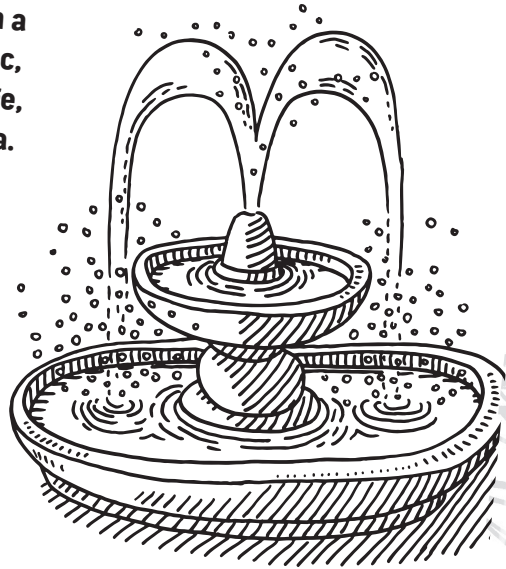
"tri" (three) + "[u]nity."

It refers to the fact that in the Bible there is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. This seems impossible to figure out. But the Trinity is not an addition problem in math; it's not a formula in science.

Instead, the Tri-unity of God means that at his very core, God is *relational*. The Father has always loved the Son and Spirit. The Son and Spirit have always loved the Father and each other (John 14:31; 16:14–15; 17:24). It's in God's deepest nature to love and show

love to others (Hosea 11:9). And he's always been that way. C. S. Lewis, author of the *Chronicles of Narnia* said it this way:

“In Christianity God is not a static thing—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance. . . . [The] pattern of this three-Personal life is . . . a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality.”²



So, for Christians, when God says he loves you, he means it from the bottom of his heart. When you ask him to show compassion or mercy, you don't have to convince him or try to make him do something he doesn't want to do. The Tri-unity of God means that he is—and always has been—full and overflowing with love.

Personal

Relationships

